

Programmatic Analysis and Tiering

This case study is provided as an example of a programmatic assessment that does not result in any decisions and is used in subsequent NEPA analyses and documents.

Project: Ozark-Ouachita Highlands Assessment

Practice: A broad assessment of baseline resource and environmental conditions of a large landscape. These assessments provide context for determining what changes in land use plans need to be considered, focusing NEPA purpose and need statements for forest plan analyses, and arraying information for cumulative effects analyses.

Agency: Forest Service

Point of Contact: Bill Pell (501) 321-5320, bpell@fs.fed.us

Dates: *Began:* 1997 *Ended:* 1999

Project Description: The Forest Service initiated the assessment and worked with other agencies to develop a synthesis of the best information available on conditions and trends in the Ozark-Ouachita Highlands, 6.5 million acres of public land and waters. These conditions and trends will have a bearing on the future management of the Region's national forests. The assessment report does not make decisions, but provides information for planning. The assessment serves as the basis for defining planning questions and structuring the purpose and need for changes in management on forest plans. It also serves as a basis for focusing the NEPA process at the forest plan level.

The assessment addresses the condition of lands and waters for over 6.5 million acres of Federal land. It addresses the terrestrial, aquatic, atmospheric and socio-economic aspects of the assessment area. This assessment contributes to the revision of 3 National Forest long-term management plans.

Internet Site: [Welcome to the Ozark / Ouachita Highlands Assessment Page](http://www.fs.fed.us/oonf/ooha/welcome.htm) available at <http://www.fs.fed.us/oonf/ooha/welcome.htm>

Value as a Practice:

Results: This project demonstrates the concept of assessing the current conditions and contrasting those with desired conditions before development of a purpose and need for action or initiating the NEPA process. These assessments serve as excellent benchmarks for environmental analysis and cumulative effects assessments for program or forest plan level NEPA analyses.

Challenges overcome: Maintaining a focus on the pertinent management questions to be addressed and the data and information necessary to address these questions; maintaining databases that were easily accessed and available in standard formats; limiting the assessment to summaries of existing and desired conditions without proposing actions for change.

Challenges remaining: Keeping the plan and analysis dynamic and current. Maintaining cooperation and coordination among interest groups for amending forest plans in the Region.

Source of information/references: *“Ozark-Ouachita Highlands Assessment – 5 volume report, 1999*

Programmatic Analysis and Tiering

This case study is provided as an example of programmatic and subsequent tiered NEPA analyses and documents.

Project: Shoreline Management Initiative (SMI)

Agency: Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA)

Point of Contact: Harold Draper, (865) 632-6889, hmdraper@tva.gov

Dates: *Began:* 1994 *Ended:* Ongoing

Project Description: In 1994, TVA began an initiative aimed at determining a new policy for residential shoreline permitting on its system of dams and reservoirs in seven states – the Shoreline Management Initiative (SMI). The project responded to increasing numbers of applications for residential shoreline alterations such as docks, boathouses, and retaining walls. TVA analysis showed that half of the shoreline could be developed within the next 25 years if current trends continued. TVA decided to conduct a programmatic EIS on the SMI policy seeking to better protect shoreline and aquatic resources while allowing residents reasonable water access.

As alternative development proceeded, it became obvious that the development of permitting standards could not be easily separated from decisions on where and when to allow residential shoreline alterations for new subdivisions. In the Record of Decision (ROD), TVA decided to continue to allow docks and other alterations along shorelines now available for residential access and to establish uniform standards for the alterations. For those reaches of the shoreline where residential access rights did not exist, TVA established a policy to ensure that no more than 38 percent of the shoreline would be developed for residential access. A no net loss evaluation procedure was established that linked the shoreline management policy to an ongoing reservoir land planning process. When public shore land is proposed to be made available for residential use, the no net loss evaluation procedure is initiated. For a given proposal, TVA seeks to "compare the ecological, recreational, and other amenities of the properties involved in the proposal with the public and resource values of the TVA land over which the access rights are requested."

In the reservoir land planning process, TVA land on reservoirs is allocated to planning zones. Projects on the reservoirs are reviewed for consistency with the planning zone, using site specific environmental reviews. Lands that are allocated to natural resource management uses are further planned for specific forest, wildlife, and public use management practices. The reservoir land allocation process is then further tiered to natural resource management plans which determine specific forest, wildlife, and public use management.

Value as a Practice:

Results: The programmatic level review established direction for the program and provided a high level analysis which facilitates preparation of tiered site specific documents. The overall policy and environmental considerations are now linked to site specific decisions and analyses providing a better picture of the potential cumulative impacts and health of the shoreline and associated aquatic resources. This process promotes efficiency because a common set of regulations and policies are established first, and subsequent proposals are reviewed for consistency with these standards before undergoing further environmental review.

Challenges Overcome: TVA overcame initial reluctance to conduct programmatic reviews. The reluctance was due to the perception of excessive costs and uncertain benefits. TVA successfully demonstrated the long term benefits of such an approach and the improvements to agency decision frameworks.

Challenges Remaining: Due to budget considerations, the planning has not been completed for all of the reservoirs. However, the shoreline permitting standards are still in effect for the other reservoirs as is the no net loss evaluation procedure.